

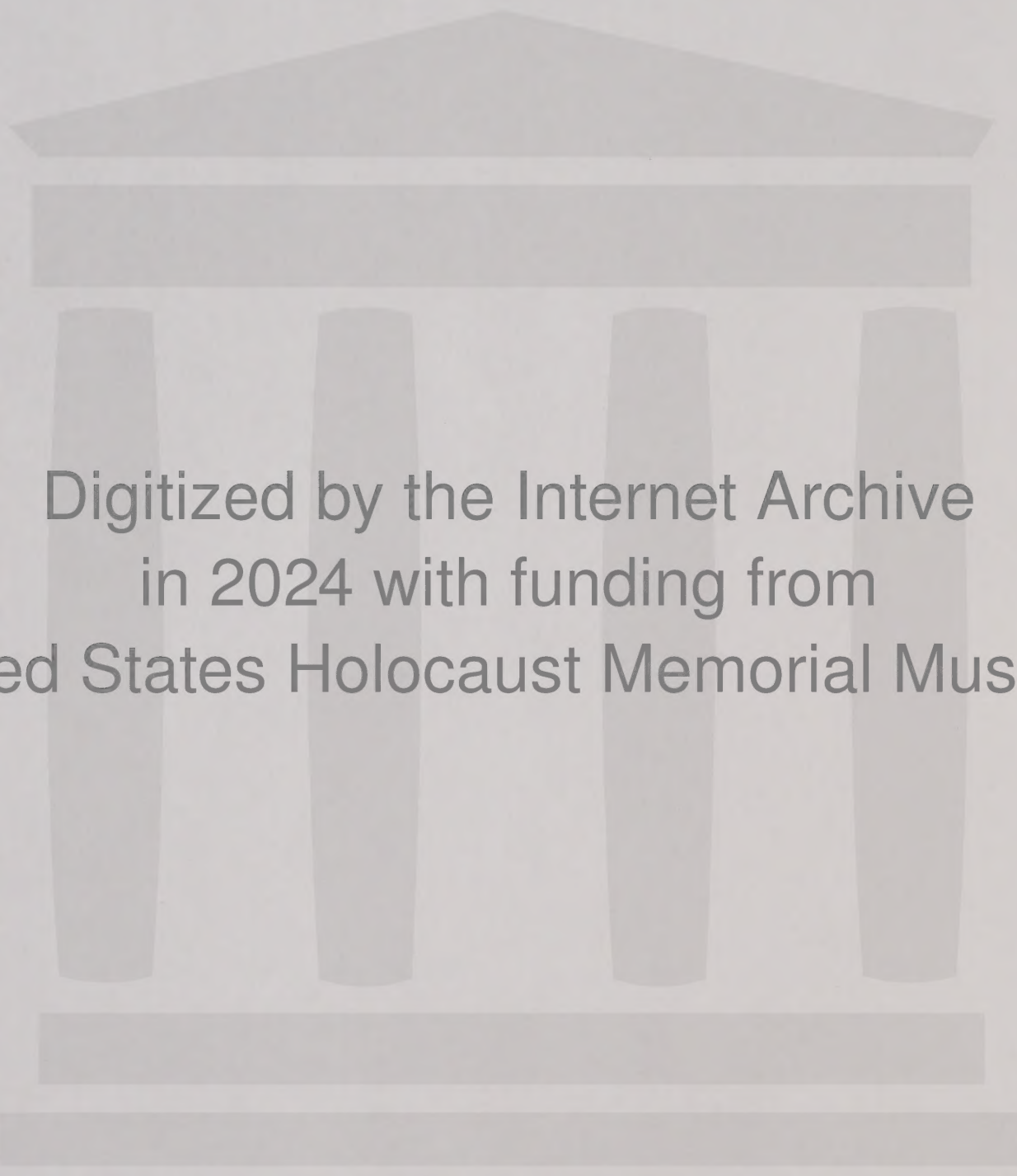


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The Healing Journey
by

Sidney Finkel with Lucille Shanahan

Overview

The Healing Journey is a conversation between Sidney Finkel and today's young people about the Holocaust, racism, anger, revenge, pain, and the power of love and forgiveness to liberate. It combines the power and the vividness of Elie Weisel's Night and the aching simplicity and youth of Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl with relevant reflections of contemporary life present in neither.

Sidney Finkel is a Holocaust survivor who tells the story of his childhood vividly and honestly. History, courage, luck, and foolhardiness took him on a journey from Poland in 1939 at the age of seven to Buchenwald, Germany; Terenstadt, Czechoslovakia; and finally, as a teenager, to Windmere, England in 1945. While compelling, his story is only part of his journey. Indeed, as he sees it, the value of his experience is not merely in his physical survival of great hardships--many have done that; the value of the experience lies in what he is doing with it. "By talking to young people, I heal myself, so that they can heal themselves, too," says Mr. Finkel, of his conversations with over 20,000 young people in the last five years. Through his story, he speaks with them about confronting pain then and now, about facing abandonment and isolation, and about overcoming anger and guilt. He speaks with them about disrupted relationships and the importance of loving and allowing oneself to be loved in order to be fully human. He never lectures; he shares

simply and eloquently what he has learned is necessary to be happy.

The young people who hear him frequently respond with equally honest and compelling letters. They represent widely diverse economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Their ages span from middle school to college. They represent urban, suburban, and rural areas. However, regardless of where they come from or what has happened to them, these students relate Mr. Finkel's emotional experiences to their own lives. Through his experiences, they discover the power of personal choice and find a way to begin their own journeys. A young Hispanic girl writes to him cautiously of the pain she feels at having had an older brother killed in a gang fight, a pain she has never shared before. A Jewish junior high student speaks of the hurt of present day discrimination among her classmates. A gifted eighth grade boy asks how a person learns to feel again. "They do more for me than I do for them," declares Sidney. The letters show he does quite a bit for them.

One could call Sidney Finkel one of the lucky ones. He survived the Holocaust when at least six million others did not. Along the way, he lost a father, a mother, two sisters, friends and relatives, a place to belong, and a part of himself. Although physically healed after the war, he coped throughout his life with feelings of abandonment; he struggled with his God, and, for almost fifty years, he kept his story secret--even from his family.

In 1992, after visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C, he

shared for the first time the events of his childhood with his then adult children. Encouraged by their response, he began to speak to adolescents on behalf of Facing History and Ourselves, a national educational organization which attempts to engage teachers and students in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in the past so they may better confront the moral choices of their own lives in the present. By talking to these young people, Sidney Finkel found himself on a remarkable journey of psychological healing.

The students to whom he spoke not only listened to him, but they joined him on his journey. Sidney began to receive letters--*hundreds* of letters--from the young people who heard him. They write not only of the power of Sidney's story, but also of its effect on their own lives today. They speak of their generation's need to face the results of hatred and racism. They speak of the need to change their world, so that they might never have to experience a Holocaust. And, most of all, they speak of their everyday lives with their hurts, triumphs, and resolves. They speak, like Sidney, simply and profoundly.

The Healing Journey is a first person narrative of Sidney Finkel's story juxtaposed with letters from young people relating his experiences to their own. It will contain about 125 pages with Sidney's story in a dialogue with parts of relevant student letters. (Samples of entire letters are attached as an appendix to the proposal.) Pictures of Sidney, some of his family members and the young people to whom he speaks are available.

Because of Mr. Finkel's age during the Holocaust, he is an especially provocative voice to young people. Their letters to him are, in turn, a perfect vehicle for examining the discrimination, intolerance and other challenges that they face growing up in today's society.

About the Authors

Sidney Finkel is a sixty-six year old survivor of the Holocaust. He was born in Piotrkow, Poland , in 1931. In 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, he began a journey that would eventually lead him to Buchenwald Germany; Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia; and Windmere, England in 1945. For the last five years, he has been speaking of his childhood war experiences to children and adolescents through Facing History and Ourselves. His speaking engagements have taken him not only throughout the Chicago area, but also throughout the United States. He has been covered extensively in the local press. Mr. Finkel was interviewed on videotape by Steven Spielberg while he was preparing, "Schindler's List." His story is one of those included in Martin Gilbert's recent book, The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors (Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 1997). Mr. Finkel is retired. He lives in Glenwood, Illinois, with his wife of over thirty years, Jean. He has three children, two step-children, and eight grandchildren.

Lucille Shanahan is a high school English teacher with over twenty-five years of experience working with adolescents aged twelve to

eighteen. She has also taught undergraduate and graduate school education and humanities courses. She has been a master teacher in her own district for many years and has served as a speaker and consultant to districts throughout the state of Illinois on improving teaching effectiveness. Through her friendship with Mr. Finkel, she has been able to hear him speak to numerous and diverse groups of students. She has witnessed first-hand his profound effect on young people and the sincerity of the responses which he generates from them. Writing in the first person, she has let Mr. Finkel's story tell itself. She has culled through the hundreds of letters he has received to find those which speak most deeply to Mr. Finkel's experience and to the moral concerns of today's young people. Ms. Shanahan holds a masters degree in humanities from New York University and a masters degree in educational leadership from DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois. She lives in Park Forest, IL and teaches at Bloom Trail High School, Chicago Heights, Illinois.

My name is Sevek. I was born in Poland in 1932--not a good time or a good place for a Jewish boy to be born. I did not know that until later. I want to tell you what happened to me. I want to tell you my story not because it's so unusual, but because it's all I have. I tell you my story for a very selfish reason. By opening myself up, being as honest as I know how, I no longer have to carry the horrors I have experienced by myself. You are helping me overcome those years. I have the feeling that my father, mother, sisters, and brother are also standing here with me. By telling my story, they continue to live in my memories of them.

If I tell it well, my story will become part of your stories, and your stories will become part of mine. We will go on a journey together to learn to heal what hurts us. Together, we will face the Holocaust; we will face our pain, and we will heal.

I am writing this letter two weeks after your visit to Fayetteville High School. I am still trying to understand all that I feel after listening to your story. First of all, I am so grateful to you for sharing such a personal part of yourself with us. I know how much courage it takes to face pain head on, and I have so much admiration for the journey you are on to

understand exactly what happened to the young boy who lived through such horrors.

I thought so much about your family--your mother, your father, your beautiful sisters. I know how I feel about my family. I adore my sisters and treasure my mother and father. Your loss touched me profoundly.

I am telling you this because I believe there is hope in knowing that there are young people today who really do care about others' pain and who feel a responsibility for their fellow man. That's why your mission to speak to young people is so vital. Thank you for creating something good for the rest of us from your traumatic life experiences .

Renee

My story begins before the German invasion of Poland when I was about five years old; it ends in 1945 in England when I was just about thirteen. In between there are stops in Germany and Czechoslovakia. In 1937 I lived with my family in a town in Poland called Piotrkow Trybulanski. In the late 1930's, Piotrkow was a fairly large-sized town of about sixty thousand people of whom about a third--almost twenty thousand--were Jewish. Jews had lived in Piotrkow for over seven

hundred years. The Polish Catholic community and the Jewish community lived side by side for this very long time, but not always happily. There were periods of time when Jews were expelled from Piotrkow, or their synagogues were burned down.

By the 1930's the Jewish community was a very, very vibrant--though separate--community. We had all of our own institutions. If we belonged to the scouts, we belonged to a Jewish scout troop. We had our own libraries and our own schools, including gymnasiums. The gymnasiums were like high schools and junior colleges combined. Piotrkow was famous in the Jewish world because most of the Jewish prayer books were published there. We had three or four different newspapers. It is said that wherever there's three Jews, there's four different opinions. It was no different in Piotrkow. All different kinds of political opinions and beliefs were represented in the community.

Living in Piotrkow and being the youngest son of my father, Lieb Finkelstein, I had a tremendous sense that I belonged to this community. Because of my father's standing in the town, I was a privileged and powerful little boy. I loved to roam the streets of my hometown by myself, and to discover all types of adventures. It seemed to me that no matter what route I took, I was stopped and questioned by an aunt, uncle or older cousin. "Where are you going, Sevek?" "Sevek, what are you

doing?"

I especially liked to spend time in the market place, and smell all the great food on display. I had no trouble obtaining a sandwich or a candy bar from the vendors. They all knew who my father was, and that they could get him to pay for their generosity.

You, too, may have this sense of belonging about your school, your home, your church, your favorite places. As you get older you will always look back to these places. All my life, I looked to find my hometown again and this comfortable sense of belonging. All my life, I could not find it.

Hearing our students question Mr. Finkel gave us many insights into the profound and wide impact his story had on them. For some it was a new view of history. For others, it was a personal revelation that terrible things can happen to you in your life, but you can survive them, both physically and spiritually. What it did for all of us was put a face on the Holocaust. It made it personal because it happened to someone we care about.

He was not what they expected. One girl echoed my unspoken first reaction--"I thought he'd be tall, skinny, and bald." Many students remarked with surprise, "He's happy!"

Students came to me all year with some variation of.- "Mrs. Sanders, I saw a show on the Holocaust and I think I saw Sidney," or "Look at this book, Mrs. Sanders. Doesn't that boy behind the barbed wire look like Sidney?"

Nancy Sanders

I'm the youngest of five children. I wish to describe to you my family because I want you to know what happens to them as my story goes along. Also I get a good feeling by talking about them . By telling their stories, they live again within my memories.

My father owned a lumber yard. He also contracted to build homes for his customers. My brother, Issie, and sister, Ronia, worked there with him. The relationship between my father and Issie was always stormy. They disagreed on everything and argued fiercely.

In contrast my father was very gentle and loving toward me. I was always his favorite child, at least that's how he made me feel. Although I was just a small child, my father introduced me to customers and sometimes even took me to business luncheons with him. I sat at the restaurant table with my father and the other businessmen. I will never forget the waiter bringing a large tray of Viennese pastries for my selection. All the men looked my way to watch me make my choice.

Eating in a restaurant in Poland was a huge event. There were certainly no McDonalds. I loved those moments and felt very important and special.

My father talked to me of serious matters as we walked through the streets of Piotrkow, and he spoiled me terribly. I felt as if I had some magic shield around me because I was the son of Lieb Finkelstein. I could take risks that others could not. Nothing could harm me. My father would not allow it.

I do not remember much about my mother. Her name was Fajga. She was my father's second wife. My father's first wife had died in childbirth in 1922, and as was the Jewish custom, my father had married the younger sister of his first wife in 1923. Fajga seemed content to turn my care over to others in my family. The few details that I do remember about her I will tell you as part of my story.

I'm just 13 years old, but don't ever feel bad about what happened during the Holocaust. None of it was your fault. I think of you as a hero. You're a hero just to have the courage to pass on your story. As long as it stays well known, I think maybe we can make some people realize why racism and fighting over religion are so pointless.

Jamie

The oldest child was my sister, Ronia, who was about twenty years older than I. She was a very attractive, forward-looking young woman. With blonde hair and blue eyes, she did not look Jewish at all. She was a graduate of the gymnasium which was a very big deal in Poland. She even worked which was very unusual for a woman at that time. She was a feminist and Ronia was also a Zionist. As a young woman, she had been ready to immigrate to Palestine with two of her girl friends. At the last moment, my father said he could not bear to be separated from his oldest child, and Ronia stayed in Poland. Her two school friends went to Palestine without her.

The greatest impact for me came when Sidney showed prewar photos of families from his town. I had never identified with the skeletal forms found in the camps. I could envision them prewar as poor, uneducated peasants. But these photos looked like my family's photos. His sisters dressed up for a day in the city looked like my young aunts in their finery as American college girls. I felt a personal pain to know that life as they knew it halted over night. Suddenly there was no sense to be made of the world, there was nothing they could do about

it. These healthy, happy, people haunt me more than the gruesome camp portraits.

Nancy

I remember that Ronia was married and that I used to spend a lot of time at her apartment because there was always something going on at Ronia's house. It was very, very interesting for a young boy. I remember Ronia, as the oldest one in the family, taking care of me even more than my mother. I was just crazy about Ronia. I loved her very much.

Then came my brother Isaac, or Issie, who was about seventeen years older than I. He was also a graduate of the gymnasium. In addition to Polish, Issie spoke German and Hebrew. After finishing school, Issie went into business with my father. I remember him best, however, after he was drafted as a soldier in the Polish army. Two years of service in the Polish army was compulsory for all young men, but with a little money, there was always ways to get out of serving. Also, the Polish Officers Corps was not too insistent on Jews serving in the army because the Jews were usually educated and had to be made officers.

My brother, Issie, however, demanded to serve in the Polish Army. He felt very proud; he felt that serving in the army was his duty as Polish citizen. He was honored to serve in the army despite the fact that there

was tremendous harassment of Jews at this time.

I especially remember Issie coming home to visit in his Polish army uniform. I was about five years old. He had a wide belt around his waist and a bayonet swung at his side. I looked up to him; I worshipped him. I begged him to walk me to school so that all my little friends could see him. I felt very proud of him.

I would like to thank you for coming to my school and telling your story about what you have been through. It is hard to talk about what happened to you and your family. I, too, have lost people in my family. I have lost my father, brother and step-father. It is very hard dealing with that. Someone shot my father when I was two years old. He died in a few minutes. When I was eight, they shot my brother with a shotgun. It shot half of his lung off. He died twelve days later in the hospital. This year on November 23, my step-father was found dead in an alley. He had been robbed. That day was very sad for me and my family.

Sergio

I had another sister, Lola, who was fifteen years older than I. Lola, I did not like. I did not like her because she was always criticizing me. “Why aren’t you as good as the other boys? Why are your manners--especially your table manners--so poor? Why aren’t you more polite?” I didn’t like her criticism at all--especially when I felt she might be right.

My youngest sister, Frania, was only five years older than I. Frania and I were the children of my father and Fajga. She was barely a teenager in 1939. Frania was absolutely beautiful. I know she was beautiful because no matter where we were, if Frania were inside, the boys were sitting outside waiting for her. They wrote messages for me to carry inside to her. I earned quite a few candy bars that way. It was Frania’s job to take me around. She took me to the movies at Piotrkow’s one movie theater. I remember seeing “Snow White” with Frania. I was very scared of the witch. A circus came to town occasionally. I remember her taking me to the circus. Frania never seemed like she really minded taking me with her all the time, and I just loved being with her.

You have changed my views on many things for the rest of my life. You moved me in the way I looked at the Holocaust, but more importantly, in the way I look at my childhood. I dedicate

the rest of it to having fun and enjoying life to the fullest. That is my contribution to the children, like you, who were in the Holocaust.

Best wishes,

David

I was in second grade when I began to notice an increase in Anti-Jewish feeling. There had always been bad feelings toward Jews in Poland, but with all the German propaganda filtering in to Poland, I began to feel it more. When I went to school, there were now always kids on the corner throwing stones at the Jewish kids. They called us names--"Dirty Jew" and stuff like that. This went on all the time. I just couldn't understand why this was happening. These kids who were throwing the stones didn't know me, and I didn't know them. I came to the conclusion that they were throwing the stones because I looked Jewish. I tried covering my face with my hands as I walked, so they couldn't see that I was Jewish. Of course, this didn't help, and the harassment continued.

I am Korean so I know what it is like to be a minority. People used to make fun of me too. After you came, many people changed their viewpoints. They probably didn't listen or

feel other's pain before today.

Mandy

I had heard many Holocaust stories before, but none of them really seemed as real and as personal as yours. I was honored to have you talking to our class, alive and well, not only physically, but emotionally as well. Your speaking made me feel a lot more than any book or documentary ever could.

Paulina

One day my father gave me a pair of ice skates which was a fantastic gift. Ordinarily, we skated in the icy streets on our shoes. When my father gave me these ice skates, I was very excited. I wanted to know what it felt like to feel steel hitting the ice. I was ready to go to the park to try them out when my family said I could not go because I would be beaten up. I had to wait twelve years to find out what it felt like to really ice skate. One of the first things I did when I came to the United States in 1951 was to ice skate at Rockefeller Center in New York.

I think it was really a great idea that you could come to our school. Most of the people in our school feel as if it's a major

crisis if they don't get the kind of car that they want. To have you come and tell your stories, though, really put things into perspective for us.

John

But in 1939 at the age of seven, I figured out that there was something wrong with being born Jewish. Being born Jewish was being born defective. Being born Jewish gave somebody else the right to be prejudiced against me and to hurt me physically. Having realized my basic defectiveness at an early age, I felt ashamed of being Jewish most of my life. It was not information that I volunteered; rather it was something to be kept inside--a secret. It is our secrets that make us sick, and this early secret affected much of my life.

I am one of the students who got the privilege to listen to you speak. You asked us our feelings, yet I didn't say mine. I thought it was wrong to say too much. I would like to now share my feelings. My feeling is that I hope to God that something like the Holocaust never happens again. The hate felt back then

against Jews has yet to die out. Even today in my school I receive discrimination.

In sixth grade I was told Jews only want and care about money. I took great offense at this because I am a Jew. I told my teacher, and he said, "Don't worry about it. It doesn't matter." How can he say this? He should have defended me. But that was in the past. I can't do anything about it now. Also this year a boy in my class decided to make the Nazi salute whenever he sees me. I told him that it was mean, but he continues to do it. Truthfully I don't know how people can do that and not feel horrible inside.

None of this compares to what you went through, but I have a little sense of what you felt for being hated because of who you were born. I can't tell you how much I appreciated your coming to talk to us. Hopefully, people will realize that a religion is what a person believes, not who they are. I am grateful you are alive to tell your story and help teach people that this cannot happen again. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Jenny

Hitler was now on the radio often. The whole family would gather around to hear his voice on the radio. I did not understand German much, but I was frightened by the ugly, angry voice that came over the speaker. It was frightening to us all. It seemed as if every other word was “Juden”-
-“Jew”. We were scared. My family feared that war was going to come. I was excited by the idea. I loved to look at the Polish soldiers, and I was very nationalistic. Issie was sent to the front to fight. I was sure that the Poles would beat the Germans. My family understood what was happening much better than I.

You make me feel like I want to go home and spend more time with my family. Usually, I'm trying to get out of spending time with them.

Nicole

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The Germans invaded Poland and my beloved Piotrkow Trybulanski -- on September 1, 1939. I remember the day well. My school, which was to reopen that day after summer vacation, did not open. I had an unexpected and, I must admit, gratefully accepted holiday. I was not sorry that there would be no school on that day, but I had no idea that there would be no school for me for the next six years.

My father thought it would be wiser and safer for us to leave Piotrkow, which was sure to be bombed, for the tiny village of Sulejow about eight miles away. We took a few belongings and put them into a horse drawn wagon. My father, mother, Frania and I started walking toward Sulejow. Everyone else seemed to have had the same Idea. There were thousands of people on the road to Sulejow. To me, It was very exciting --a festival.

As I walked beside my father, he entertained me by telling me about our family history. Never before today had my father engaged me in such a long conversation. But today, as we walked along, he told me of an older sister who had died at the age of thirteen of a heart condition, long before I was born. I could see tears come to my father's eyes as he described Lidia's illness and the efforts to save her life. I had never heard about Lidia before and I felt very close to my father as he shared his sorrow with me. He also

told me that there were terrible times ahead, but I should have courage because we would survive.

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Mother and Frania were walking behind us. Looking back at them, I considered my beautiful sister, Frania. I loved her more than anything else in the world, and, at this moment, I was terribly afraid for her. I wanted very much to protect her, and even though, I was only seven and she was twelve, I believed that I could and would. My father and I would not lose another. My father and I would protect those we loved.

When we reached the village of Sulejow, the tiny village streets were jammed with thousand of refugees from Piotrkow. As we milled about seeking safety, I heard the sound of airplanes. I looked up in the sky, and I saw these huge, loud, metal monsters dropping bombs all around us. People ran in all directions looking for shelter from the explosions. Fires broke out, and people screamed and fell. Some were wounded; many were dead. I couldn't run. I couldn't hide. I just stood watching the bombers with horrified fascination.

When the bombers had finished their work, the fighter planes swooped over us. They flew so low that I could clearly see the pilot in the cockpit as he trained his machine guns on the fleeing people. My mother, father, and Franla were huddled together against a stone wall. I could see and hear my mother shouting frantically for me to fall to the ground, but I couldn't do it. I was totally

engrossed in the drama I was witnessing. All of sudden, I felt my mother's arms around me as she threw me to the ground and covered me with her body. I felt protected and safe, but not

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for long. Frania was weeping hysterically. My mother abandoned me, took Frania's hand and ran with her to get away from this doomed place. I stayed on the ground. When I finally got up again, I was all alone.

I know you "re still hurting in the inside about what happened to you. I really thought that it was very brave of your mother to cover you up when the German gunners were firing on you. So just remember that your mother was a very, very brave woman. We heard you say like you feel you don't belong. Well, you do, and you're loved too.

• Tory

• •

I walked around. I looked at the corpses, the disassembled body parts; I heard the crying of the wounded and smelled the stench of burning flesh. I can still see, hear, and smell them. I walked around alone and frightened. I was also angry. How could my mother and Frania leave me? Why didn't they take me with them? Where was my father? I cried and yelled my father's name.

Suddenly above the din around me, I heard my own name being called. It

was my father. He took me by the hand and we ran into a nearby forest. We stayed in the forest for three days and three nights. We were terrified of going back to Sulejow. What if the bombers

returned?

My first reaction to your story was one of total shock. I can't imagine how anyone could do such things to another human being as what was done to you. What a total lack of humanity!

I can see how this must have really changed those who survived. How could you ever have a normal life after what you went through? It is really amazing how the human spirit can survive.

Jennifer

Eventually, however, we did return to Sulejow. The survivors were digging mass graves for the dead; we learned over one thousand people had died in Sulejow on that early September day. Whole families had been wiped out. We were also able to learn that my mother and Frania had managed to escape on a horse-drawn wagon to another town. We, too, found a ride on another wagon back to Piotrkow. I remember the driver let me hold the reins of the horse as we rode back into my home town.

When we returned to Piotrkow, the Germans were already there. Nothing would be the same for me, for my family, for my whole community again. Almost immediately the Germans set up a Jewish ghetto

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in Piotrkow. They took the least desirable part of town, where perhaps five thousand people lived, and announced that now twenty thousand Jews must live within that sector. It wasn't a ghetto as we use the word today. We couldn't get on a bus to leave the ghetto; we couldn't just walk out. It was secured. At first, we were allowed to leave for a few hours, but within a short time, the ghetto was closed.

Then came the regulations. Jews could not own businesses. Jews could not have more than one hundred dollars to their names. All schools were closed. No Jewish children were to be educated. We had to wear white arm bands and eventually, little yellow stars. I remember my mother sewing the yellow star on my clothes. I didn't know what it was. I thought, at first, It was something 'to be proud of --like a medal.

I'm glad that you came to talk with us and tell us what you went through. I feel that having you here will help kids see that you must look beyond the labels to the person. We will learn not to judge people by race, religion or color. I am very glad you are here.

Your friend,

Stephanie Eileen

Mr. Finkel said that he never really regained a sense of

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belonging In the world. He said that at parties, he always has to ask his wife, "Am I having a good time now?" What the Nazis did to him was so awful that his feelings were left numb. I can understand how he would still be numb after more than fifty years.

Our family was allowed one and a half rooms in which to live. We were lucky. The water was outside. I remember carrying pails In from the well. The toilets were outside, of course, too. But at this point, we were still living as a family unit. We were together. We adjusted to our lives. During this time, I was even happy. I didn't miss school. New things were happening everyday. I could take chances and have adventures. I escaped the ghetto and brought back black market cigarettes to sell and earn money. I was useful to my family.

Being an African-American, I have suffered hatred and prejudice In my life, but nothing as severe as what you went through. I admire the strength and courage you had through the war. Even as a small child you had more courage than some full grown men.

Sincerely,

Darryl

One day I saw a group of young boys lined up. I learned that they were going to work outside the ghetto. I lined up with them. I found myself working in a glass factory. What could children do in a glass factory? After the glass was blown, our job was to pick up the hot glass form with a fork and run with it to a conveyor belt where the glass dried. Children were faster runners. The work was hard and hot, but I liked it. I was useful. I could go into the cafeteria and get extra food for my family. Some of these children would survive later because they had worked in the glass factory.

Another time I saw a group of young men unloading truck for the Germans. They were supervised by a German army officer. Again, I lined up with them and began to work. Each approached the back of the truck and a worker on the truck lowered heavy a sack on to his back. Although I was small for my age and younger than the others, I was strong and I did my share. I was proud of myself for being able to keep up with the others.

Then as I approached the back of the truck, the kid unloading the sacks I've never forgiven him for this-- the kid didn't place the sack on my back. He threw it on my back. I stumbled under its sudden weight; the sack fell and broke

open. I was really mad. I was so mad that I went

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up to the supervising officer and reported the boy. I wanted him punished. And besides, I didn't like the work; it was too hard; and I didn't want to do it anymore.

Without a word, the officer took out his revolver, told me to stand against the side of a well and aimed his gun at me. I stood there. I had no feeling whatsoever-- no fear, no anger, no regret, no nothing. Fortunately, for my children and grandchildren, an older man came along just then. He talked to the German officer very quietly, very confidentially. Eventually, the German put his revolver away, and I ran home.

I knew I was going to be in trouble with my father. I was right. No sooner was I home, than the man from the street was at our house telling my father how stupidly I had acted. My dad was mad at me; he was really mad at me. He prided himself on never hitting any of his children. That day he made an exception. It only stopped my adventures for a few weeks, however.

Thank you so much for speaking to our class the other day. Your story really moved me and made me want to do whatever I could to make your life a

better one. The most moving anecdote you told, I thought, was about your almost getting shot. It really was a close call and really made me think: "Why Sidney

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*Finkel? Why did God choose Sidney Finkel?" I bet you think
about that a lot.*

Sincerely,

Andrew

As I said, we had managed to adjust to our lives in the ghetto. Then after the Germans invaded Russia, they determined to exterminate the Jews. First, however, the Germans rounded up all the Jews from the surrounding villages and relocated them into the Piotrkow ghetto. The same area, or less, that had originally housed five thousand ,and then twenty thousand, now held over thirty thousand people.

Conditions became extremely serious, especially for the poor people from the surrounding villages. They had no connections in the' ghetto; they knew no one. It was not possible to feed everyone adequately; sanitation became impossible and disease was rampant. Typhus broke out. I saw the bodies of

small children, the bodies of children with whom I played, being carried out by the undertaker.

I remember especially one little girl. She was about eleven years old; so was I at the time. We were great pals together. If you want the truth, I think I loved her. I didn't know how to tell her that. She had pigtails and I loved to pull on them. That was my way of telling her I

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liked her. I used to steal food from my house and take It to hers. Then one day, I didn't see her any more. She, too, had caught typhus, and she died.

I would like to thank you for coming and telling us about your experiences. I'm bewildered how anyone could do such meaningless, horrible, out right stupid things to others. I do have some questions, though: Were you ever ashamed of yourself or others for not fighting back? Are you glad that you survived, or do you think you would have been better off dead?

I'm know It must still be hard for you, but I'm glad you spoke about the Holocaust. There are so many people who believe that it never happened. Thank you once more.

Kristen

